

A DEVOTIONAL FOR THE ELECTION SEASON

By Mother Abbott Bailey

Election Devotional Six: The Gospel as a Bridging Story

“I’m convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.” - Romans 8:38-39

THE GOSPEL AS A BRIDGING STORY

Not long ago, I heard John A Powell, law professor and leader of the Othering and Belonging Institute, talk about stories in times of change.¹ He says that when change happens at a rapid rate, we don’t know how to react to it, and so we need something to help us deal with it. That something is stories, and there are two dominant stories that we tend to come up with, bridging stories and breaking stories.

Breaking stories are those stories that close off a person or a community, that create distance among people, and imporous boundaries, or that eliminate difference to make everyone the same. Bridging stories, however, are about the ways we turn towards one another, listening, engaging, and not condemning even and especially when there is the inevitable disagreement.

I believe the Gospel is, at its heart, a bridging story and that our call as Christians is to stand with Christ in bridging the broken and beleaguered places and spaces in the world.

It is, unfortunately, all too easy to get swept up in the breaking stories that demand our attention with their strategy of divide and conquer. One might be inclined to argue that election seasons are inherently breaking stories, especially in the political climate in which we’ve been living for quite some time. I would suggest, however, that they don’t have to be. Not for us. Not when we stand with Christ in bridging the gaps guided by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit with our deepest values and faith commitments at the fore. Not when we lead with love at the heart of all we do. Breaking stories can become bridging stories, giving witness to the truth that

¹ Powell, John A. “Institutions of Othering and Radical Belonging.”

<https://Forthewild.world/Listen/John-a-Powell-On-Institutions-of-Othering-And-Radical-Belonging-329>, May 2019.

nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, and with that Love at our center, nothing can separate us from one another.

What does it look like to stand with Christ with Love at the center?

One way might be in the stories themselves. In his prayer for reconciliation, Pádraig Ó Tuama writes, “Where there is separation, there is pain. And where there is pain, there is story. And where there is story there is understanding and misunderstanding, listening and not listening.”² His prayer then invites us to turn toward each other’s stories, to wrestle and engage and listen, trusting that God is found in the space between.

In the simple (and yet demanding) act of turning toward one another and the stories we hold inside us, we hope a bridge into being.

JOURNALING PROMPT

What is a breaking story you are telling yourself right now? What pain sits there?
What is a bridging story you are telling yourself right now? What joy sits there?
What is the Love that builds a bridge at the heart of these stories? How are these stories invitations to turn toward others?

SCRIPTURE

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, [and] let the word of God dwell in you richly. [Colossians 3:12-115a, 16a]

CLOSING PRAYER³

Savior, Redeemer, Beloved of God: Clothe us in your love, strengthen us to live gently on this earth, give us humility to see all we encounter as precious to you, and teach us to walk with kindness and patience this hour and always. Amen.

² Pádraig Ó Tuama, and Corrymeela Community. *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community*. London, Canterbury Press, 2017.

³ Episcopal Church. General Convention. *Daily Prayer for All Seasons*. New York, N.Y., Church Publishing, 2014, pg. 33.

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